

Drawing Connections and Engaging in Conversations That Help Us Compose Our Lives

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Story is everything. All writing of whatever kind begins with narrative. The first story, the primal story from which all others come, is your own story—your own personal history; the tale you would tell about yourself if you chose.

John Rouse

The Approach

My demonstration is meant to suggest and support my contentions that...

1. The quality of student writing can be improved through the integrated use of the language arts. That is, students who have opportunities to compose exploratory drafts prior to assessment; to talk and to listen to others talk about their writing; to visually represent and to observe the visual representations of others that are related to their writing; to read their early drafts aloud and listen to the early drafts of others, and/or to engage in dialogues about their writing will compose pieces of writing of a higher caliber than those who draft pieces of writing without similar opportunities.
2. Drawing helps writers recall specific, graphic details of past events.
3. Building a sense of community enhances opportunities for the further intellectual and personal development of those who will form learning communities. A sense of community can be fostered by allowing time for participants to share portions of their lives with one another.
4. Curricula that begin in the “lived lives” (Maxine Greene) of students, centering on issues of deep concern and interest to them, are more apt to garner student motivation and investment. The concerns and interests that are expressed in early narratives and storytelling can serve as springboards toward further, less personally-centered inquiries and studies.

¹ This idea for this presentation grew from a presentation originally developed by my good friend and colleague Pat Fox, Director of the Coastal Georgia Writing Project in Savannah.

A Selected Bibliography for the Demonstration:
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Childers, P., Hoson, E and Mullin, J. (1999). *ARTiculating teaching writing in a visual world*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

“The question is: How can we exploit the intersections between the visual and the verbal to improve learning?”

Ernst, K.(1994). *Picture learning: Artists & writers in the classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

“The artists workshop shows what is possible as students use writing and picturing as partners to express their meaning and has implications for expanding the writers workshop to include visual ways of knowing.”

Ernst, K. (1997). *A teacher's sketch journal: Observations on learning and teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

“”Beginning with the understanding that elementary students have stories to tell and to picture, she shows how to link art with reading, writing, and learning in the classroom, takes art into the writers workshop and across the curriculum, and establishes an important partnership with classroom teachers and parents.”

Fox, R. (1994). *Images in language, media, and mind*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

“Whether we receive them, send them, or think in them, images are the most basic element of thinking and communicating—the DNA of language, of media, of mind...The message to educators is that we can no longer separate visual literacy from verbal literacy, that we must treat word and image equally and simultaneously.”

Johnson, P. (1997). *Pictures & Words Together: Children illustrating their own books*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

“In *Pictures & Words*, Paul Johnson address important questions about the process: What do children learn through illustrating their texts? How do texts and illustrations “work” together?”

Newkirk, T. (1997). *The performance of self in student writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

“”Drawing on over two decades of experience teaching college freshmen, Thomas Newkirk begins by claiming that this writing is a ‘performance of self’ in which students take on various